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Leroy Garrett, Editor

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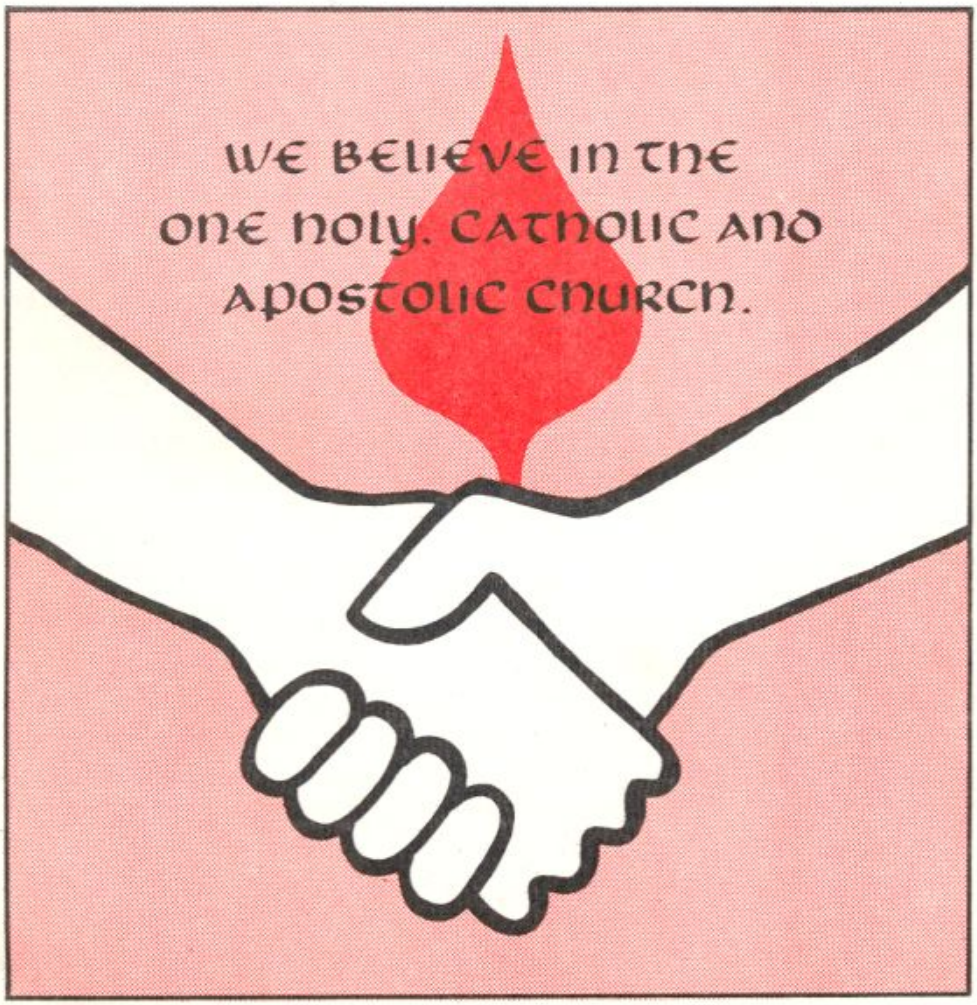

Volume 15, No. 3 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **March 1973**

The Church of Christ: Yesterday and Today . . .

THE CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH

We believe in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. —from the ancient creeds of Christendom

Those of us who are heirs of the Restoration Movement have been bequeathed with a rather negative attitude toward creeds. We were, after all, born and bred on anti-creedalism as well as anti-clericalism, so why should the editor of a *Restoration* journal appeal to a creed, whether ancient or modern, as a starting-point for a series of essays?

This is to misunderstand our founding fathers. They objected to creeds because they were made tests of fellowship and sometimes even terms of pardon. Creeds took precedence even over the scriptures, and they were made the basis of theological systems. So long as creeds served the purpose of articulating one's personal faith, and were not imposed upon others, there was no objection and should be no objection. Campbell, for example, had great respect for the ancient creeds of the Christian faith, especially the Apostles' Creed, from which the above is taken.

But this glorious proposition! *We (or I) believe in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church,* is found in several of the oldest creeds. The old divines that met at Chalcedon in 451 lifted this statement from earlier creedal statements and approved it as expressive of their faith. Those 318 fathers who met at Nicaea in 325 referred to "the catholic and apostolic church" in their creed, as did the 150 divines that met at Constantinople in 381.

A succinct creedal statement like this compels one to state what he believes to be the *substance* of an idea. What is *really* important about the church? What are its absolute qualities? The church may take divergent forms, depending on age, culture and circumstance. But what are the marks that must always be present if it be God's church upon earth? We can hardly say that it must have a certain name, for the church goes without a particular name, if any name at all, in the scriptures. So with organization, worship and mission. We have some information about such forms, but it is clear that even the New Testament churches differed in these regards.

This means that our many sermons through the decades on "The Identity of the Church" are at least suspect, for the emphasis has been more on form than on substance. We have missed the point in stressing the right name *(Church of Christ* of course), the correct worship (the "five acts" which we presume to be clearly scriptural), the proper organization (a plurality of elders and deacons, but not necessarily deaconesses, which we presume to be monolithic in the primitive churches), and the right mission (educational and benevolent work that we define to our own liking). And we have been very particular,

beyond what the scriptures allow, about such methods as choirs and organs and such agencies as missionary societies and Sunday School unions.

All this implies that this is what the church is all about, but we all know that a people can be "right" about all such things and still not be the true church. So, what is the *substance* of the nature of the church? That is, what are those characteristics without which the church cannot be the true church? The ancient creedal statements about the church take us close to the answer, and this is because they get at the heart of what Christ intended for the church.

How much have we talked about the *oneness* of the church? Can a people who are content to be divided really be the church?

How much stress have we placed upon the *holiness* of the church? If we are truly a redeemed people, then we are a pilgrim community whose citizenship is in heaven. Can we be conformed to this world and still be God's people?

Have we neglected the *catholicity* (or universality) of the church in our thinking? We cannot be southern, or midwestern, or American; in our faith. Nor white, nor middle-class. Nor sectarian, nor provincial. Nor parochial, nor class. Nor adult, nor masculine. What insight those old saints of yesteryear had in discerning that God's people must be *catholic* to be His true church.

And what have we said of the apostolicity of the church, which is to affirm its rootedness in the authority of the apostles, the Master's own plenipotentiary ambassadors to the world?

This is where I stand when it comes to pointing to the essential marks, of the Church of Christ both yesterday and today. These are the absolutes that which a people must have in any age or in any nation or culture —for the Church of Christ upon earth. I believe in the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ. Never mind about exactness in name, worship, organization and work, for here differences are allowed. But a *divided, carnal, parochial,* and *anti-biblical* people cannot be the church.

And this is our theme for the next few installments —the oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church of Christ, but not necessarily in that order. It is appropriate to begin with the catholic or universal nature of the church.

The term *catholic* is used as early as 125 A. D. in a letter written by Ignatius of Antioch to the church in Smyrna, and it probably goes back much earlier. To the Smyrnaians he said, "Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church." The term occurs also in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (155 A.D.), referring to all those everywhere who make up the community of believers. It was a long time before the term became a title for a denomination. For centuries it described what is so essential to the character of the church: that it is composed of all those who are in Christ, and that in Christ there is no distinction of class or race or sex, regardless of station in life. But it meant even more, for it pointed

to the universal adaptability of the gospel, transcending both time and circumstance. A *catholic* gospel is a gospel with universal principles, centered in a Person who is indeed the Universal Person. We shall speak to this later on.

That anyone or two sects in Christendom should take catholic as a name contradicts the nature of the term. *Roman* Catholic or *Greek* Catholic are satires upon an otherwise beautiful adjective. Anything that is distinctively Greek or Roman cannot, of course, be universal or catholic. But this has been an habitual fallacy in a divided Christendom. A good case can be made for the presbyterial, baptistic, congregational, and even methodistic aspects of the church, but it is folly for a people to be specialists in any of these and thus take unto themselves a distinctive name.

And we should use the term *catholic* much more than we do in our references to the church. *Why I Belong to the Catholic Church* would be a better title for a talk than *Why I Belong to the Church of Christ*, for with that topic one is at once on universal ground, whereas the term "Church of Christ," since it has been adopted by several groups as a distinctive name, has one treading the waters of sectarianism. Too, there is no reason to forfeit such a meaningful term to those who use it parochially.

Logicians have a way of getting at the essence of a term by establishing its opposite, which the dictionary calls an antonym. In doing this with catholic, we come up with the term *particular* or *particularity.* This is significant in discerning the nature of the church, for the church's teaching and practice must be in universals rather than in particulars. Another way of saying it is that the true Church of Christ can have no characteristic that is not worldwide in its outreach, whereas sectarianism is marked by particularity, with each sect having its own set of particulars that distinguishes it from others. A church with doctrines peculiar to itself is a sect rather that the catholic Church of Christ.

It matters not how large, influential, or prosperous a communion may be, if it has doctrines peculiar to itself it cannot be catholic. Dogmas like the bodily assumption of Mary, transubstantiation, indulgences, papal infallibility may be Catholic but they can never be *catholic* in that they do not lend themselves to universal application. Whatever is truly catholic we can properly expect of every believer.

We are equally guilty if we come up with notions about "the five acts of public worship," one exclusive name, one "infallible" interpretation, and exclusivistic notions about methodology in work and worship, especially when they are made tests of fellowship and "the marks of the true church." One cannot, for example, impose a cappella singing upon all believers everywhere, for it falls into the category of particularity rather than universality. Any church, therefore, that makes a cappella music a test of fellowship cannot be catholic. It has to be a sect in that it excludes other believers from its fellowship over a practice that cannot be universally binding.

Compare this with Paul's seven one's of Eph. 4. We can be most catholic in insisting that all disciples of Jesus believe in the one body, the one Lord, the one baptism, the one faith, the one hope, the one Spirit, and the one God.

The catholic features of church cannot, therefore, be any more than what is necessary to salvation. If a cappella music is universal rather than particular, then it is essential to being saved. It is as simple as that. Measuring one's sectarianism is not difficult. Any *peculiar* demands he makes of other believers as a condition of pardon and fellowship mark him as a sectarian. An idea that cannot be applied prospectively (to all believers everywhere and all that ever shall be) and retrospectively (to all believers that ever have been in all history) is a sectarian notion and contradicts the principle of catholicity. We can say any professed believer that ever was or ever shall be that denies the Holy Spirit is not a true disciple. But sectarian notions will not hold up under this principle of inclusion, which is the essence of the catholicity of the church. Catholicity means that no particularity can be made a test of fellowship. This does not mean that a group cannot hold views peculiar to themselves, for this is surely inevitable. But it means that such ideas will be held as opinions and personal preferences, and will not be imposed upon others.

The ground of catholicity is the mind of God and its end is fellowship between man and his Creator. Through Christ we are called into fellowship with God, which cannot be other than catholic. Such has always been God's intention with man. While He did favor Israel as a nation, He was preparing a people in order to give the world a universal gospel. So, the Israel of the Old Testament makes possible the "Israel of God" in Gal. 6:16, a catholic community. While the old Israel was always the people of God, they were never so in the fullest sense. God's plan of *community* could never be satisfied short of catholicity.

In order to call all men into fellowship with Himself, God began by calling a single person out of Ur of the Chaldees. But His purpose in Abraham was to make a nation, so that "all nations of the earth will be blessed." There may have been a parochial priesthood under the old system, but ultimately there was the universal priesthood of believers, the Church of Christ becoming "a kingdom of priests" (Rev. 1:6).

The idea of corporate personality runs throughout scripture. God deals with a man by calling him into a community. Moses and the Israelites are thus described as "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). The prophets proclaimed God's purpose for the ages: "I will be to them a Father, and they shall be to me sons and daughters."

It is as a family that we must come to see the church. It is not an institution or organization, but a family community of brothers and sisters. Jesus came to make men brothers, and this he does by changing their lives, giving them himself so that they can love one another. So the great dynamic of the family of God is love.

The purpose of "the mystery which was kept secret for long ages" was that the Church of Christ would be catholic, made up of all peoples and not only Jewish. God's "plan for the fullness of time" is expressed in Eph. 1:10 as *to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.* The point of the gospel is that *now* in Christ Jesus "you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). This makes all men in Christ *blood* brothers, irrespective of what garb they wear or what infirmity they bear. It is a blessed reality that Jesus came to make men brothers. This is something far different than merely sharing a space on a church roll. Men become brothers only through an inward experience that transcends them both.

The story of mankind is one of war and hostility, man at war against God as well as man at war with man. In giving us Himself the Creator gave us peace. "He is our peace," the apostle could say of Jesus, and he describes Jesus as *making* peace between hostile forces: "He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace" (Eph. 2:15).

We are his creation, one new man in him. Black and white are two, but Jesus makes them one. Jew and Gentile are two, but Jesus makes them one. Male and female are two, but Jesus makes them one. Occidental and oriental are two, but Jesus makes them one. This is the catholic Church of Christ.

The Church of Christ today must seek that fellowship that God creates in human hearts rather than that which results from its own dictation. People are not in fellowship simply because they meet within the same four walls of a building from week to week. Close proximity does not make for unity any more than conformity of opinion. Many a family resides under the same roof without sharing a loving relationship. In evaluating our relationship with a man, we should ask ourselves whether God claims him as a child rather than whether the church claims him as a member. If he is God's son, tghen he is our brother. If fellowship does not mean this, it means nothing.

And this is the great catholic or ecumenical principle, that God unites all men (and eventually all creation itself) in Jesus Christ. The purpose of the ages is that sinful man might find himself in the fellowship of God's own son. Those who respond to Christ by obeying the gospel can sing that new song that Rev. 5 tells about.

"Worthy are thou to take the scroll and open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth."

If one is "ransomed of God," then he is in the Body of Christ, no matter what color, or how poor, or even how theologically confused. No matter whether he wears beads and has long hair, or whether he speaks in tongues, or however different from myself, if he is God's then I lay claim to him as my brother.

John Oxenham captured the meaning of the catholic Church of Christ when he wrote that great hymn about how Jesus is larger than all the shallow limitations that even ecclesiastics would impose upon him.

In Christ there is no East or West,
In Him no South or North.
But one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide world.
In Him shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find.

His service is the golden cord,
closely binding all mankind.
Join hands, then, brothers of the faith,
whatever your race may be!
Who serves my Father as his own,
is surely kin to me.
In Christ meet both East and West,
in Him meet South and North.
All Christly souls are one in Him,
throughout the whole wide earth.

—the Editor

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PEOPLE WITH PROBLEMS
(Rather Than Problem People)

I don't want to be the kind of minister or editor who is isolated from the "world out there" where one finds the blood and gut issues of life. The preacher who insulates himself against the wilderness of sin and trouble by hiding out in his office all day is not likely to do any problem solving when he stands before the people. The big evangelist who zooms into town a few days, holes up in a hotel, conducts easy services at a fashionable church, dines with the affluent, and leaves with their bounty in his pocket is hardly in the class with those who are ministering at the raw edges of our sick culture.

When I sit down to my typewriter as a Christian journalist, one ministering through the printed page to folk in many walks of life and with myriad of problems, I want to do so as one who has learned in the great drama of life to "weep with those that weep and rejoice with those that rejoice."

One of the great shortcomings of the modern church is that its assemblies offer so little to the troubled soul. People come hungry and they leave hungry. They walk away bearing the burdens they brought with them. Modern preaching does little problem solving. Even though the apostle insists that all things in the assembly are to be for the edification of the saints, there is often more that is discouraging than encouraging. Religion should be a peaceful, joyous experience, but as often as not it is burdensome and oppressive.

The Bible tells us that there is a time to heal, but the gift of healing is not likely to be ours so long as we are out of touch with suffering humanity. He who sits with those in darkness can more meaningfully point to freedom's holy light.

I am writing this from northern Alabama, where I have been in a unity forum at the Grassy congregation, near Arab. I came earlier than the forum and remained afterward so that I could be with the people, teaching and visiting among them. While this section of our society is probably as serene as any, here is a brief listing of some of the problems I found in the homes I visited.

1. A brother in the prime of life dying of cancer. Standing by his bed through three visits, I grew well acquainted with his desire to live, to see his little girl grow to womanhood and to share the twilight years with his wife. Years ago I "talked over" his little girl who died from a fall, and since then his teenage son died in a traffic accident. And now he is dying and knows it. The presence of death, sickness and tragedy are baffling to him, even when he's too sick to be baffled.

2. A 19-year old who is paralyzed from his neck down. He is a bright lad, but an accident has rendered him completely helpless except to move his head. His condition is still a new experience, so he continues to explore the mystery of his tragedy. "It is hard to believe as I look down at my arms and legs that I can't move them as I always have, but I can't," he said to me with more of an air of mystery than of self-pity. "I miss such simple things as being able to scratch my nose and rub my hand through my hair," he added. "People just can't realize what it means to be paralyzed," he said. "If for just one minute they could be as I am, they would see what a blessing it is to be able to move."

3. A sister who has grown old, and now having recently lost her husband, she is in the throes of loneliness that she was not prepared for, if such people ever are. She weeps. She nurses sweet memories, aided by pictures she has clustered around her. Her loved ones are nearby, but her mate has gone, and it is a loneliness that she pretty well has to bear alone.

4. A little boy that has lost part of one foot, which affects all his plans for the future, and which makes him different from most boys his age.

5. Parents who are cut off from their married son due to unfortunate relationship they have with his wife, despite their efforts to the contrary. Rather than gaining a daughter they have lost a son. He never calls or writes, leaving them wounded and grieved.

All this and much more even within the shadow of one small rural congregation. And this area probably has fewer shadows per capita than the larger urban communities. It is just that kind of a world. Such problems bear down upon our own people, challenging the intention of Jesus not only to give us life but the *abundant life.*

They are people with problems, as we are all people with problems. We are people with problems more than we are problem people. People become problems, I dare say, because they are not sensitive enough toward people with problems. They think about themselves too much or take themselves too seriously. A chat with a kid who has lost a foot or a youth who cannot so much as lift a finger might well change their perspective and their priorities.

Churches sometimes actually *contribute* to people's problems through an insensitivity to life's dark drama. A sister who is trying hard to pick up the pieces of her shattered life makes her way to one of our assemblies only to be brutalized from the pulpit for having more than one living husband. A brother who finds excitement in a newly found truth is warned or scolded for expressing himself in the presence of what is suppose to be the family of God, his own brothers and sisters in the Lord. A youth is confused by irresponsible remarks about the theory of evolution or when he is subjected to a lot of nonsense talk about "worldliness" or "being faithful to the church" or "marrying in the Lord," which he sees to mean *marrying in the Church of Christ.*

We have made problem people by failing to feel deeply for people with real problems. We are unlike Jesus on this, for he met people where they were, allowing his love to make the big difference in their lives. The woman taken in adultery was a problem person, but in treating her as a person with a problem, our Lord changed her life.

It sometimes sounds hollow to tell a person with a serious problem that Jesus is the answer. He is not, after all, a minister of magic, and life does not come easy, nor is it without tragedy, even to his most devoted disciples. Even though we believe that Jesus is indeed the answer, the *ultimate* answer, to all of life's reverses and even to life itself, it is a conviction that should quietly motivate us in our service to others rather than a motto to be mouthed in the presence of seriously depressed people. Let Jesus as the answer begin in us, through our love as we become his Body in this world.

I may not be able to tell a brother that Jesus will take away his cancer, but I can assure him that he will, for the asking, be given the grace to bear it. And I can urge him to look for God's will in such tragedy, for God still loves him, maybe even more now that he is sick. And that God in his own way will give him victory through Jesus, and that he will turn fear into trust.

While one senses that anything he says to a youth paralyzed for life sounds like empty words, he can always speak tenderly of God's love. And even here, where life seems hardly worth living, one is to look for God's will. I am naive enough to believe that we help such people when we drop by and speak of God's love and understanding.

An aged sister left alone in this world has a more serious problem than some of us realize. She may not be dying and she is not paralyzed, but her heart aches with grief and loneliness bears down upon her as if it were a dark, rocky mountain. We need to assure her of our love and understanding, and to help her see that with the indwelling Holy Guest in her heart she is never really alone. And that Jesus will eventually lift the burden of grief, and that in it all he will minister to her and make her more beautiful and loving because of it.

A boy with a bad foot can be shown the many opportunities that one has despite such a handicap, with a reference to those heroes who have been wonderfully used of God with even greater handicaps. He might not become a tennis champion, but he might one day win the Nobel prize in chemistry. Or he might be an obscure teacher in a ghetto school. Whatever direction, it can be God's way for him, with Jesus providing the resources of strength.

Few of us are able to understand the grief of parents who have lost a son who yet lives. They will tell you that it is worse than death. Practical advice, such as suggesting that they sit tight and let him take the initiative, is easy to give. Such problems are often like volcanoes in that what appears on the surface is but a small part of what is wrong. To pray and to wait upon the Lord is a good scriptural answer, but those of us who love and minister to such ones must realize that this calls for a resignation to God's will that few of us have. This may be part of the answer to such cruel experiences. While God certainly does not bring these things upon us, being both too good and too wise, he may well use them to minister to us and to make us what he wants us to be. There is another world, you know, for which we must be disciplined and cultivated. —*the Editor*

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN POWER POLITICS ENTERS RELIGION

by Norman L. Parks

Every reform in the history of religion has been directed against the phenomenon of power, which is the essence of politics. The depoliticization of religion was at the very heart of the Reformation in the sixteenth century —the separation of church and state, the overthrow of the clergy, the purification of the language, forms of worship, and manner of life of the Christian community.

The surest way to corrupt religion and change it from a way of life to a power structure (a denomination) is to politicize its language and develop office and hierarchy. This was the tragedy of the Christian community in the early centuries after the apostles. This has been the tragedy of the American Restoration launched by Campbell and Stone. The "restructuring" of the Disciples into a "mini-Methodist" system of governance and the development of the "eldership" into a governing oligarchy in the Churches of Christ and the Christian Church reflect the re-emergence of power against which the Restoration was originally directed. The emergence of the "house church" movement within th past few years is a reaction against the corrupting influence of politicization.[1]

The goal of the Restoration was the recovery of The Way in spirit, form, and language. "Back to the Bible" meant back to Bible verbage and connotation. Strangely, the movement failed to exploit the European precedent of rejecting the non-Biblical word "church" in favor of the Biblical term "assembly" as rendered in the great Tyndale translation. The word "church" is derived from the Greek *kyrios,* which carries the political connotation of power. It is no surprise that King James demanded that his translators in effect substitute this word for the Biblical term *ecclesia*, which the hated Tyndale version properly translated as "assembly." In the quest for a "pure" language, we meet here an interesting paradox, for the New Testament writers borrow Greek political terms and give them a non-political meaning. Aristotle in his *Politics* observes that "every *polis* (state) is a community *(koinonia)"* and its entire citizenship meets for deliberation in an "assembly" *(ecclesia).* Holy Writ speaks like a non-political Aristotle: Christ's *polis* (kingdom) is a *koinonia* (community) composed of citizens (disciples) who meet in an *ecclesia* (assembly) for mutual edification, prayer, love-feasting, and remembering the death of their Lord. If there were decisions to be made, the "whole assembly" made them in choosing "the seven" (Acts 6:2), in sending Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem (Acts 15:3), and in hearing and deciding the most serious doctrinal issue of the time (Acts 15:22). The great letters of the New Testament were for the most part directed to these "assemblies," not to special "authorities" (of which there was none).

Such was the kind of society Christ came to build. It was not to be characterized by superordination or subordination, but by equality and fellowship. The power element was flatly rejected by him: "You know that the so-called rulers in the heathen world lord it over them, and their great men have absolute power. But it must not be so among you. No, whoever among you wants to be great must become the servant of you all, and if he wants to be first among you he must be the slave of all men" (Mk. 10:42-43). Since the chief vehicle of power is office, it followed that his *ecclesia* had no offices to be filled, no positions to be held, no emoluments of power to be enjoyed, no instruments of rule to be wielded. It is true that a typical assembly had various functions to be carried out and works to be done. Older men carried the responsibility of "feeding" (educating in spirituality) the

flock as pastors, shepherds, leaders, presbyters, bishops, and presidents (presiders at meetings). Numerous men and women served the community in many ways as deacons and deaconesses. Some carried the Good News to the unsaved as preachers or evangelists. All bore a direct relationship to their Lord as ministers, servants, slaves. But these various terms did not define offices or positions, but were merely descriptives of work or relationship.

The contemporary Restoration movement has changed the assembly into a church, work into offices, service into power, and relationship into hierarchy. Title to property bought from the common treasury is held by a board of bishops, not by the membership. Decisions are made at the top, not by the membership as in the early Christian communities. Offices and positions of power have been made out of what were once roles, and are generally self-perpetuating, elders choosing their successors, naming deacons, and filling the recently emergent office of "minister." The model for this power-wielding and decision-making system is not the Biblical *ecclesia*, but the corporate board of directors. Not remarkably, the role of "teacher" has not made it into the status of an "office," and remains, apart from the pulpit, among the most neglected and underdeveloped aspects of the religious community. It is ironic that a movement which began with Jeffersonian Democracy and expanded enormously on the flood tide of Jacksonian Democracy and the leveling force *of* the Westward movement should develop such an oligarchy of power as to make it one of the least democratic religious movements in America.

Emergence of the "Minister"

Our study of the phenomenon of power in religion can be highlighted by examining the "office" of "minister." If anyone doubts that this is an office, his doubts will be dissolved by examining the church letterhead, the weekly bulletin, or the newspaper advertisement. This man is not the "slave" of God, but the "minister" of the church. He may actually be a "prime minister," with one or more "associate ministers" or "assistant ministers." This is a term derived from the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible. One recognizes the concept of "little" in the prefix "mini." It was a Roman political position of assistant to the "magister" (one recognizes the concept of "great" from the prefix "magi"). But far from being a person of insignificance today, he is an officer of prestige and power, the foremost figure in the local assembly. He is the chief pastor, the expounder of orthodoxy, the public exposer of unorthodoxy (usually prefaced with the sad announcement that he "must call names"), the chief promoter of the treasury, the author of excommunication edicts, and a major voice at the "business meeting." No church today is considered healthy or mature without a "regular minister." It may take almost the whole of the common treasury to finance one, but "necessity" demands it. And since a system feeds on itself, each passing decade increases this necessity.

This office, totally absent from Biblical literature, is an interesting fabrication. How much of a fabrication it is becomes clear in the replacement of the word "minister" from the modern and more accurate translations of the New Testament by the words "slave" and "servant." There is an obvious absurdity in the vehement Church of Christ insistence on a "plurality" of pastors while church after church has only one pastor in fact, with the fact concealed behind the name "minister."

A Relationship Rather Than An Office

In the New Testament the various Greek words which have been generally translated "minister" do not describe either an *office* or a *work* in the Christian community. They picture (with one exception) the *relationship* which all Christians bear to God. Gentiles and Jews alike were once slaves of Sin. The Savior bought them from the auction block and these redeemed souls became his property ("Know you not that . . . you are not your own? For you are bought with a price …"). Those thus bought are described as Christ's "slaves" *(doulos).* As an example of the more than one hundred times this expression is used (and regrettably translated "minister" in the King James Bible), Paul in the salutation of his letter to the Roman disciples describes himself as "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ." It is a fitting finale to Biblical literature for the aged John, in picturing the redeemed about the throne in the New Jerusalem, to write, … and his slaves shall serve him" (Rev. 22:3).

Considering the present usage of the word, it is obvious that a beautiful concept is robbed of its meaning when Romans is made to read "Paul, a minister." It is pertinent to observe further that in no instance does Paul or any other New Testament writer refer to himself as a "minister" of a church, either at Ephesus or Corinth or any other place. There is a tremendous gulf between the primitive Christian concept of *slave of Christ* and the latter-day innovation of *minister of a church.*

Not content with the ordinary Greek *doulos,* Paul on occasion applied the undignified or dishonorable term *huperetes* ("galley slave") to himself or fellow workers. This was the lowest level to which a slave could sink. Yet he writes in 1 Cor. 4:1: "This is how you are to look upon us, as galley slaves of Christ . . ." The imagination is sorely strained to see behind the strut, bombast, pomposity, egotistical sureness, or papistical pontificating of some "ministers" the abject humility of the slave at his oar.

Every Man a Priest

To carry through a beautiful figure of the priestly sacrifice and to emphasize his special mission to the Gentiles, Paul applied the term *leitourgos* to himself in Romans 15:16: " . . . my divine commission as a *priest* to the Gentiles in the service of God's gospel, my aim is to make the Gentiles an acceptable offering." Once more, the King James Bible renders

this "minister . . . to the Gentiles," and thus pales out the concept of priestly servant. Since the clergy-laity classification is at least officially rejected by the Church of Christ, the priestly connotation of this term has application today only as every Christian is a priest.

Like *baptizo*, the Greek word *diakonos* has found its way Anglicized into various places in English versions, but at other places is translated "servants" or "minister." Was Paul a "deacon"? Yes, in 1 Cor. 3:5: "Paul and . . . Apollos . . . servants by whom you believed." So was Tychicus, "the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord" (Eph. 6:21). Even the pagan Roman magistrate may be a deacon, for the magistrate "is God's servant for your good" (Rom. 13:4). Most impressively, and curiously neglected, there is "our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the *ecclesia* at Canchreae." Obviously this is no office or position which Phoebe or Tychicus or Paul or any other *diakonos* held, for there is no office or position in God's *ecclesia* —only relationships, responsibilities, roles, duties, services, and privileges. The term does not describe Phoebe's work or that of any other person. It explains a relationship.

All Are Ministers

Thus the conclusion presents itself that in any congregation of saints there are as many ministers as there are working Christians. There can be no minister in "a special sense" any more than there can be a disciple or a Christian in a special sense. It makes as much Biblical sense to write: "the Christian of Oak Hill Church of Christ" as "the minister of Oak Hill Church of Christ." The religious movement which once set as its goal the recovery of the New Testament order and language has in fact created a position wholly in conflict with the broad meanings given in Holy Writ. The term "assistant minister" makes sense only in modern clerical language, but becomes ridiculous when rendered "assistant slave." If the church has the right to create an office like "minister," then it has the right to create presbyteries, synods, conventions, bishoprics, archbishoprics, cardinals, and popes.

Clearly such language is not "speaking where the Bible speaks" and it pauperizes our understanding of our spiritual relationship with Christ. Moreover, it obscures the pivotal truth of the Christian system that Christians have been bought from the corrupting dominion of Sin, Wrath, and Death and have been transferred to a new master. Finally, it replaces the concept of community with the fact of organization, with authorities and power —and a devitalized membership. Such is what happens when power politics enters religion.[2]

1 The contemporary "house church" movement is a development of considerable significance and worth special investigation. Doctrinally it is a reaction against the legalism of the contemporary church, a positive search for a more personal Jesus-oriented relationship, and a rejection of the institutionalization and politicization of religion. As one house church participant recently wrote the author, "we have found both elders and deacons (in

the sense of officers) to be superfluous, as well as the old hang-ups of who has authority and who doesn't, when each person is allowed to read a scripture, lead a song, pray or do anything the Spirit leads (1 Cor. 14:26). There is no pulpit to elevate one person above another; everyone simply shares in love."

2 A fascinating study in the operation of power in religion lies in the abandonment of the concept of separation of church and state by the Christian colleges and their vigorous lobbying in Congress and in the state legislatures for tax refunds. In a speech at Abilene Christian College in the fall of 1972, Jim Edmonds, administrative assistant to the mayor of Houston, urged ACC supporters to "become involved in the legislative process."

"We need to become Christian lobbyists for Abilene Christian College," he urged. "There is no greater cause to work for than Christian education," He urged the college boards and council to "fight for more tax dollars to help finance private higher institutions of learning." There would not have been a more direct or blunt appeal for taxing the public to support teachers, missionaries, preachers, "ministers," or whatever institutionalized religion decrees. The full amount of the speech appears in ACC Today, Nov., Dec., 1972.

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INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

Allowing God to speak to us through the Bible is not a simple matter. While we believe the scriptures reveal to us the mind of God, we must bear in mind that we are, after all, referring to words upon a page, and that there is only a limited sense in which we can think of the mind of God reduced to paper and ink. But insofar as the glory of God can be communicated in the words of a book, we believe the Bible does this. But still we are looking into a glass darkly, and it will only be when we see Him face-to-face that we will know as He now knows us.

Indeed, the Bible provides us with more understanding than any of us ever completely gain. What we do gain depends on our ability to interpret, and again we must insist that the task is not simple. The oft-heard comment "Take the Bible for what it says" or "It means what it says and says what it means" only begs the question as to what interpretation is all about. The question remains, *What does the Bible really say?* Certainly it means what it says, but *what* does it say?

Rules of interpretation are probably a good thing, but I find them boring. I intend this essay to be a heart-to-heart talk about how to get more out of Bible reading.

It is well to realize that we are talking about a dangerous book. Even Peter complained that some in his day, ignorant and unstable folk, twisted Paul's letters "to their own destruction." But the problem was not wholly the people's ignorance or instability, for the apostle concedes that there are things in Paul's letters hard to understand.

But the Bible is not dangerous only because it is difficult, but because it is so easily taken too lightly. "Religion" is not dangerous, for in its many forms it can be taken superficially. But the claims of God upon the human heart is serious business, and that is what the Bible is all about. The Bible is not an ethic or any kind of treatise on how to be good. Moralizing has no particular urgency about it. But the question as to what the reader of the Bible is going to do about Jesus is as weighty as eternity itself.

This is why the Bible must be approached in a different way from any other book. If calling on a king or a president is considered a substantial experience, then surely one cannot open the book of God and enter its pages with anything but deep reverence. Like old Moses who removed his sandals amidst holy ground, the believer looks upon the reading of the Bible as if it were communion with God Himself. He is asking himself, *What is God saying to me in these pages?*

Really now, can a man do anything more important than that? And what pleases God more than for one to love His word? There is only one man in the Bible that is called "a man after God's own heart," and a careful study of David's life will reveal that God so praised him because he had such a beautiful and sincere love for the word of God, despite all his faults. "Oh, how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day," the psalmist could cry. "Thy word is more to be desired than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb," says David.

If I made a list of rules for interpretation, that would be the essence of them all: *to love the Bible like people love gold, and to long for it as one might long for the drippings of the honeycomb.* If one loves God's word and sincerely desires to understand it, this means more than a thousand commentaries. He who sincerely wants to know will pray for understanding, and God will hear and give him light that effort alone cannot attain.

Our people generally have not been taught in *prayerful* Bible study. We are reluctant to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That man after God's own heart would pray, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things from thy word." That is a good "rule" for understanding. Let us open the scriptures in prayer to God that His Spirit will strip our mind of any hindrances, and that he will enlighten our hearts that we might grasp what God wants us to know. If the Spirit "opens their eyes," as with David, then this becomes a vital part of really understanding.

Robert Burns, the Scottish bard, depicts this spirit of unstudied and simple reverence toward the Bible in his *The Cotter's Saturday Night.* He describes the cotter making his weary way home after a hard day's work, only to be greeted by his humble family and

simple fare, “the halesome parritch, chief o’Scotia’s food, the soupe their only hawkie does afford.” Supper over, the father gathers the family around him, and with his bonnet laid aside he takes in hand the big Bible that was once his father’s pride, and with patriarchal grace declares, “Let us worship God.”

The poet describes their singing as “artless notes in simple guise,” but still “they tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim.” Then “the priest-like father reads the sacred page, how Abraham was the friend of God on high.” Or it may have been the Christian volume on “how guiltless blood for guilty man was shed.”

Then kneeling down, to heaven’s eternal King
The saint, the father, and the husband prays:
Hope ‘springs exulting on triumphant wing,’
That thus they all shall meet in future days:
There ever bask in uncreated rays,

No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear.

True, the like of the cotter may have only a King James version, and he may not know of such things as a commentary or Bible dictionary. But he gets the point as to what religion is about, and he *wants* to know and he wants his family to know. That is when Bible reading makes sense.

The poet Burns knew that those with “all the pomp of method and of art” had more *technical* understanding of religion than the cotter, and so he referred to their “Devotion’s every grace, except the heart.” He saw that the honest and good heart is not only the nerve center of vital religion but also the backbone of a nation.

From scenes like these ole Scotia’s grandeur springs,
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad;
Princes and lords are but the breath of Kings,
‘An honest man’s the noblest work of God.’

God looks to the man with a broken spirit, to him who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Such a one will be filled, such a one will have the knowledge that matters most, irrespective of his understanding of Greek or Hebrew terms.

We all know, of course, that the student of the scriptures should have all the help he can get, and that technical studies should be encouraged. But without the honest and good heart all such application means little.

Interpreting the Bible is something like interpreting great music. The violinist doesn’t “do Mozart” simply by playing the right notes. A musician may have a great deal of technical information about Mozart, even to the degree of lecturing on the finer points of

his compositions. But it may be the fellow from "down home," who has but a superficial grasp of the musicology of Mozart, who is able to *get inside* the heart of the composer and make his music come to life.

Technical stuff about the Bible can be terribly boring and unedifying, and it is unlikely that God ever intended that His word be taught in such a way. Such a part of scripture as, say, *Ephesians*, can be approached in view of its major themes and ideas, and especially in reference to *the point* that the apostle had in mind, or one can get bogged down in such technical questions as for whom the letter was intended and such theological problems as predestination and foreordination: Even college classes in *Ephesians* will often accentuate the form and neglect the substance.

What glories there are in *Ephesians*, even in the early verses. We are told of God's plan for the ages, to make everything one in Jesus. We are told of the promised Holy Spirit, which is given as a guarantee that God will someday redeem our bodies. We are told of the resources of power that we have in the Spirit, including "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you." We are told of the nature of the church, that it is "the fulness of him who fills all in all," which teaches us that we are to be Christ's life in this world.

What a tragedy it is when we move among great riches and are satisfied to gather stones. It is little better when we go from verse to verse, laboriously wringing from each line even more than was originally intended, with no effort made to relate what is written to the ongoing problems in people's lives, "Jim, how does a verse like this apply to your problems down at the shop?" or "Mary, what does this passage mean to *you?"* are questions too seldom asked.

The Bible is not made up of theological essays or philosophical treatises to be poured over by literary geniuses. It is mostly a collection of letters, history, and devotional materials, written amidst the storms of life, intended to inform, inspire, and encourage. For this reason we should look for the main ideas, the overarching purpose of the writing, and its message to our hearts and to our generation.

No doubt but what the ghost of Mozart could appear and complain of many musicians, "He played my notes but not my music." One can get bogged down in the letter while missing the spirit. We can get inside "the spirit of scripture" by panting for God as the hart pants for the water-brook, to use David again.

I am convinced that any reasonable person with an honest and good heart. with several translations of the Bible before him, can cultivate a beautiful understanding of the scriptures. And the one necessary thing is for him to open the book with reverence and with prayer for guidance, always asking himself: *what is God saying to me in this passage? —the Editor*

We are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world. —*Ghandi*

We do not want the men of another color for our brothers-in-law, but we do want them for our brothers. - *Booker T. Washington*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Scholars abroad have not said as much about speaking in tongues as have American churchmen, perhaps because the phenomenon is somewhat more with us just now. But the *Expository Times*, a most responsible and respected journal from Edinburgh, Scotland, has a provocative piece in its current issue on tongues, written by a Dominican priest of Oxford. He sees the New Testament as presenting "a balanced and fair picture of tongues," which means that the experience is not so elevated as to put pressure on believers to seek the gift, and yet it encourages those who have the gift to use it to grow into a fuller and richer experience of the Christian life as a whole.

The priest sees two main problems about tongues, one being that believers may be over impressed by pneumatic phenomena, while the other is that amidst the experience one may become too concerned with matters that are really less important. And yet the priest sees validity in tongues for our time: "It is a gift expressive of the newness which is in Christ, helping us to praise God and to pray to him as he inspires us, and enabling us to rejoice in him in a kind of spiritual inebriation that enriches the whole person and makes for wholeness even in the subconscious."

One is left to wonder if the Dominican himself might not speak in tongues, but he never really suggests this.

If there is a "tongues center" anywhere in this country, it would surely be Tulsa. The influence of Oral Roberts and his university is only part of the reason for this, for the Full Gospel Men's Christian Fellowship is leading the way for the charismatics. There is a monthly meeting of "Tulsa Men for Christ" that attracts 600-700 for breakfast, while a similar gathering of "Tulsa Women for Christ" numbers even more —all definitely charismatic. And a lot of Church of Christ folk are right in the middle of it. One informed brother, who is a bit puzzled by all this, can name a long list of our folk in the Church of

Christ in Tulsa who speak in tongues, and he concedes that their lives have been dramatically changed for the better, that they are definitely more spiritual than before. Also surprising is that the "main line" ministers, who might be expected to declare war on all this, have shown reasonableness and sensitivity. At least one preacher has gone beyond that in that he too has become charismatic, albeit somewhat on the Q. T.

The committee of Restoration folk who are putting together the 8th Annual Unity Forum for Tulsa this summer are well aware of the charismatic influence in their city and in their churches. Their plans call for a "cards on the table" discussion of the tongues question, with no holds barred. You'd better plan to be on hand! For more details of this unity meeting you should write Larry Bradshaw, 10841 E. 34th St., Tulsa 74145, who chairs the committee.

Christian missions around the world are in something of a crisis, due mainly to the revolutionary changes taking place in the institutional churches. The practice of developing western churches in foreign lands, which have been transplantations of an alien culture, is no longer effective. Too, missions have been so conducted as to make the mission group endlessly dependent on the "sending" church, and the new church has been expected to be like the sponsoring group. Moreover, the mission church has often been exclusive in its own culture, its membership hardly ever touching the core of its own people. All this too often resulted in a mission that was sectarian, colonial, and provincial.

Things are now undergoing radical change: western expansion is past, colonialism is dead, and we are now living in a time of ecumenical reality, indigenous churches, and the development of nations. The church itself has become the mission. As Elton Trueblood has said, "The greatest mission field in the world today is the church."

Sectarianism is a dead duck on the mission field. Missionaries are cooperating as never before. It is no longer "our work" but God's work. Churches are even helping each other in financing missions. Decisions are now being made on the field by the people themselves, rather than at headquarters back home. Even countries that we consider missions are themselves sending missionaries. Asian believers now have over 200 missionaries in other countries. In India there are 100 missionary agencies involved in witnessing to the world. Maybe Indians and orientals will be coming to Texas to evangelize!

But the heart of the crisis is the nature of mission itself. Is it the church's mission to be a humanizing and liberating influence that brings to man the abundant life of human wellbeing, or is it to proclaim Jesus as Lord and thus save the soul from sin? The first view sees missions strictly as a horizontal work, ministering to man's social needs and thus changing a culture for the better. The other includes the vertical, for it says that the gospel is bringing lost mankind to God through Christ. Through this of course may well come social, educational, and financial blessings as well.

So there is a polarization that is developing, with evangelicals on one side who believe it is their task to “make disciples,” and liberal religionists on the other, people more interested in humanitarian enterprises.

Churches of Christ now have a far-flung missionary program with hundreds of missionaries around the world. Most major colleges have some kind of mission forum, as do several missions-conscious congregations. Abilene Christian College recently setup a Mission Center, which is to be a kind of strategy center for world missions as well as a place for academic study in the field.

There is hardly any question but what our message in a mission station will be evangelical. If anything, we are likely to neglect the humanitarian concerns that are consistent with “making disciples.” A more lively question is whether our folk will attempt to follow the old pattern of transplanting our own church culture in a foreign land. And how cooperative will we be with other missionary efforts? There could be a difference between “making disciples” and making Church of Christ members. Will we indeed involve ourselves in the present missionary crisis and attempt to be part of the answer? Or will we be sectarian and provincial? The Lord knows —and Indonesians, Polynesians, Vietnamese, and Nicaraguans know —that the world needs no “Nashville” or “Dallas” or even “Abilene” in the farflung twilight zones around the world. Enough of us can agree that the world needs Jesus. We must cultivate a broader view of what the “we” means, and together we need to decide what is implied in our conviction that Jesus is the answer to world problems.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

I appreciated the excerpt from Diognetus. The apostolic fathers are precious witnesses to those early years and present us with examples of faith and loyalty that almost pass belief. The writers of the whole ante-nicene period are fascinating and profitable to me … I hope Pat and Shirley Boone do not let themselves become discouraged and sever all connection with us. The brotherhood needs his zeal and dedication as well as his talent. A fresh breath of spirituality is blowing through the church today, not only in the Churches of Christ, but in others as well, and there is a place for Pat and Shirley and their daughters. They may mistake the meaning of some of the things of the Spirit, but time and experience will bring correction. - *Vernon Parrott, 426 Live Oak Lane, Weatherford, Tx:76086*

The series you did on Alexander Campbell were truly enlightening, with a human interest effect. You wrote as if you had traveled with him and known him personally. Now I better understand why you have such admiration for him and the contribution he made to the Restoration Movement. —*Ted Cline, 2938 N. 40th Dr., Phoenix, AZ. 85019*

(Ted is a discerning man. I wondered how many would notice. I *was* with old Alex on those journeys! —*Ed.*)

Do I sound bitter? I'm trying not to be. Several years back I refused to worship with the _____ Church of Christ and I have not since. I am beginning to understand, with Paul's help, that this may not be right. I have felt that to worship with a group would mean I would be supporting and agreeing to what they represent. I now wonder if we could not witness to the new joy and freedom Christ has brought to us by just being there. But I find it very hard to sit still and listen to things I do not believe and cannot agree with . . . I wish I could be as positive as you are about the Church of Christ. Maybe you can help me. Frankly I can't find much to be positive about. We find very few people we love. —*Name and address withheld*

(I wrote these people that there is more cause for hope than they realize, and that, yes, their ministry can be real wherever they are if Jesus is real to them. And, really, we need not waste energy worrying about people. If we will but allow the light of Christ to shine through our lives, we need not bother about reforming others or measuring the rate of change. People who want Jesus will turn to those in whom they see His presence. That is our task. —*Ed.*)

The Appalachian Bible Belt is a place for testing one's spiritual depth. The Law is evident and the fires of Hell burn brightly. I often wish I could invite you here for a mini-meeting, but being an outcast I would be unable to get many to attend. We are presently attending the Presbyterian Church, but there is something lacking for an old "Campbellite." —*Rich Thornhill, Box 837, Grundy, Va. 24614*

(I wrote Rich that I would try to schedule his place on my next trip that way. It is our "outcasts" in such places as the Presbyterian Church that I am interested in encouraging, not necessarily many. —*Ed.*)

The phrase from Diognetus which you quoted seems to me the key to the pilgrim church idea I have been working on - "Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven." — *Bob Fife, Milligan College, Tn. 37682*

Your paper is unique. I enjoy reading it very much. I am constrained to believe that your beautiful, efficient wife does most of the thinking and writing —as most all preachers I ever knew are downright lazy. —*E. C. McKenzie, 710 Big Rock St., Canton, Tx. 75103*

(If I have any way to escape this judgment, it would have to be that I am not a "preacher" in the usual sense. And I suspect preachers might have something to say about the indolence of non-preachers. But Ouida and 1 have a lot of fun out of the playful letters

of our readers. It takes a sense of humor to keep this old world going. Yet there is wisdom in our brother's words. He knows his women, that's for sure —and preachers! —*Ed.*)

We have made great strides since you were here. My husband is no longer afforded a part in public worship, even though we still attend the same congregation. His special gift has been in prayer, and the congregation has appreciated this gift so much. Of course it hurts to be rejected (by the powers that be), but we have been used of the Lord in a prayer ministry in a private way. The Lord continues his goodness to us in every way. —*Name and address withheld*

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